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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, February 15, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THEY COVER THE RIVER FRONT." Facts from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.

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Uncle Sam's food and drug inspectors cover the river front these days.

And theirs is a gigantic job. As the flood waters recede along the seven hundred miles of inundated country, they leave thousands of tons of contaminated foods. Flour, sugar, coffee, tea, fresh vegetables, and fruits -- huge stocks of potatoes and apples and oranges and lettuce; food in tin cans and glass jars and bottles and cartons -- all of it submerged for a time in water that has washed backward through city sewers, water polluted by the filth of barns and outbuildings; water that is full of bacteria dangerous to health.

It is the duty of Food and Drug officials to see that none of this contaminated food is sold in interstate commerce.

Last month, while the flood waters were still rising, Mr. Postle, (pronounced Postal) Chief of the Cincinnati Station of the Food and Drug Administration, wired Washington for extra men to put in charge of food and drug inspection in all the river towns -- he wanted men who could report immediately to Cincinnati, Louisville, Evansville, Portsmouth, Huntington -- all the flooded river towns, to work with the State and city inspectors.

Chief Postle got his men. They gathered together in Cincinnati. They were told that their job of condemning unfit food -- and medicine -- was no cinch; that it held plenty of risks.

Warned Mr. Postle: "If any of you inspectors and chemists feels that he cannot in fairness to himself take part in this work, please let him say so and return to headquarters."

The answer? Well, according to the Cincinnati Chief, not even with a large club could he have forced these men to give up their dangerous work in the flooded towns along the Ohio. Each one went to his post of duty, arranged with local officials to be inoculated against typhoid, and began his job of condemning all flood-contaminated foods and drugs not fit for human consumption.

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After the disastrous floods of last spring, Food and Drug officials destroyed around 50,000 tons of contaminated food. They estimate a much bigger loss this year, with 700 miles of river front affected.

Chief Inspector George Larrick left Washington late last month to supervise the destruction of foods and medicines that are a menace to health. Working with local authorities, State police and soldiers, Mr. Larrick is inspecting all foods and medicines in stores, warehouses, freight cars and refrigerating plants, as the flood recedes. His instructions from W. G. Campbell, Chief of the Food and Drug Administration, were these:

"Protection of the public health demands that fresh fruits and vegetables, foods and medicines in cardboard containers and any other containers which are not hermetically-sealed and which have been under flood water, and flour and other commodities in bags shall be destroyed. The same procedure should be followed in the case of screw-top glass containers and corked bottles, since experience shows that under ordinary circumstances these products are potentially dangerous. Products in hermetically-sealed glass or tin containers may be salvaged by removing the labels and washing containers in warm soapy water. Follow the cleansing treatment by immersion in a chlorine solution or other sterilizing solution approved by the local and national health authorities. . ."

And in Cincinnati, Chief Postle issued this warning to the public:

"Every public-spirited citizen should consider himself or herself a committee of one to observe food and drug traffic. Where he has reason to believe questionable material is being offered for sale he should immediately call the local health officers and advise that office of his suspicion. Furthermore, every housewife should continue to buy groceries from her regular merchant. It would be well for her to advise him that she is continuing to deal with him because she believes he will not handle food that may have been damaged by the flood. The housewife should be particularly skeptical of any huckster endeavoring to peddle foods at a bargain price, particularly one that has not visited the neighborhood before; rather than buy from such a huckster the housewife should immediately call the local health department and advise them of the license number of the huckster's car."

And that's the end of Chief Postle's warning to the housewives of the flooded areas.

In the next week or so we shall have another report on the flood from our Washington correspondent with the Federal Food and Drug Administration.
